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JOHN McLAREN PARK AREA

proposed general plan

january 1950

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a report to Mayor Elmer E. Robinson

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San Francisco (Calif.).
Dept. of City Planning.
John McLaren Park area :
proposed general plan,
1950.

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January 24, 1950

Mayor Elmer E. Robinson
200 City Hall
San Francisco

Dear Mayor Robinson:

In response to the request you made at your Cabinet meeting on November 21, 1949 a report has been prepared on the John McLaren Park Area. As you suggested at the time, the matter was discussed with the President of the Park Commission, Harvey Teller, with the President of the Recreation Commission, Louis Sutter, with the Director of Property, Eugene J. Riordan, and with the President of the City Planning Commission, Ernest J. Torregano.

The report should be considered a general statement of policy on land use, rather than an exact blueprint to be followed. Discussions should be held among the various city departments in order to reach agreement prior to fixing the location for the proposed new boundaries and for the perimeter drive to be known as the John McLaren Parkway.

The elements of the plan outlined in the report are included in the current revision of the Master Plan and as such will be subject to official adoption by the City Planning Commission on completion of studies, in accordance with charter requirements.

Acknowledgment is made to informal advice and information secured from the Park Department, Real Estate Department, and the Unified School District.

Very truly yours,

Paul Oppermann
Paul Oppermann
Director of Planning

PO:LBC

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I SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. That a perimeter drive to be known as John McLaren Parkway be built to define the boundaries of the Park and to provide citywide access to the Park.
2. That the official boundaries of John McLaren Park be revised and that such revision be based on the proposed John McLaren Parkway, existing topography and most desirable potential land use.
3. That 46 acres now lying within the present official park boundaries be designated for residential purposes and that 16 acres be designated for school purposes.
4. That 27 acres of hilltop and steep slopes lying adjacent to but outside the boundary of the park be incorporated into the Park to permit development of the John McLaren Parkway and related uses.
5. That the total area to be devoted to park purposes be reduced from 318 to 288 acres.
6. That a topographic survey of the park area be prepared, to be followed by a preliminary engineering study of the perimeter drive and a general development plan and program for the park.
7. That land areas not required by the City to carry out the purposes of the McLaren Park development plan be returned to residential use to be developed in accordance with the overall guiding plan prepared by the Department of City Planning.
8. That such fringe areas be redeveloped as neighborhood units of sufficient size to support such services as an elementary school, playground and shopping center.

II HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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The boundaries of John McLaren Park have been under intermittent discussion since 1926 when the Board of Supervisors authorized the purchase of 550 acres of land for park purposes in the general area bounded by Alemany Blvd., Bayshore Blvd., Mission St. and the County line. Since that time the boundaries have been changed officially several times and the area has been reduced in size to accommodate two reservoirs, a public housing project, schools and institutions. The designation of the several boundaries has been based on officially dedicated streets laid out in the seventies and eighties and therefore has never been related to the potentialities of the rugged topography for park and residential use. Consequently, arbitrary boundaries bearing little relation to the realities of grades on streets and park drives have arrested and delayed the development of the area.

It is the purpose of this report to indicate how the present Park boundaries may be reshaped to derive the optimum use of the area for park purposes and to establish with a sense of permanence the areas within which residential development may be undertaken.

Original Proposals.

According to information supplied by the Director of Property, the Board of Supervisors, on October 4, 1926, adopted Resolution No. 26241, New Series, approved October 15, 1926, authorizing the acquisition of property by eminent domain proceedings for a public park, to be known as Mission Park, in the area lying south of Silver Avenue and east of La Grande Avenue. The proceedings were never instituted by the City Attorney, however, as sufficient funds were not available for acquiring all the property.

The proposed park was officially designated as John McLaren Park by Resolution of the Board of Supervisors on November 29, 1926, in appreciation of John McLaren's services to the city.

In 1927 all the property within the proposed park area was appraised for the City by outside appraisers and title reports were obtained.

At an election held on November 6, 1928 a proposal for the City to purchase, develop and equip the park by incurring a bonded debt of \$2,000,000 was defeated. The area of the proposed park at that time was 550 acres. This area is indicated on Plate 3, Proposed Park Boundaries, as the original boundary. Following defeat of the bond proposal, the City began the gradual purchase of properties for the park.

Revisions in Boundaries

The originally planned park area of 550 acres was reduced to 428 acres in 1932 by the Park Commission, and, at a later date, to 361 acres.

By several official actions large areas were taken from within the original boundaries of the Park for the School and Convent of the Good Shepherd of San Francisco, the Lick Home, two reservoirs of the San Francisco Water Department, the Sunnydale Housing Project and Crocker Amazon Playground. This playground is on Water Department property which was originally intended for reservoir purposes.

By November 1944 approximately 222 acres had been acquired at a total cost of about \$720,000 including the cost of appraisals and title reports.

In July 1944 the Finance Committee of the Board of Supervisors recommended that the park area be reduced to 271 acres.

The Board of Supervisors on September 11, 1944 referred the boundary question to the City Planning Commission for study. The Commission was directed to make a report and recommendation to the Board concerning the size of the Park and its relation to the Master Plan of San Francisco.

In a report submitted on November 17, 1944 the City Planning Commission made a recommendation that a total area of 413 acres be included within the park boundaries including certain hilltop areas important to the total park development.

On June 12, 1946 the Board of Supervisors, by Resolution No. 5557, designated the present official boundaries shown on Plate 3 including a total of 318 acres.

III RELATION OF THE PARK TO THE CITY AS A WHOLE

.....

Need for Public Sites

San Francisco, confined to its 44 square miles of land area, should be particularly conservative of areas which may be useful to provide needed public facilities. With an increasing population and more intensive use of land for residential purposes, areas which will be required for recreation, parks and schools should be decided upon now for acquisition. The vicinity of John McLaren Park offers possibilities for such uses.

San Francisco stands high among other large cities in the proportion of the total area provided for recreation to population; four acres of public park and recreation space exists for each 1,000 persons. However, the distribution of this space is such that certain communities in the city have more than their share of recreation space and others not enough. The John McLaren Park Area is one of these. No large open areas reserved for public use are available to the Mission, Outer Mission, and Bayshore Communities as Golden Gate Park and The Lake Merced area is available to the Sunset, Richmond and West of Twin Peaks communities. Yet, these Mission and Bayshore communities are lower in income-group classification and higher in juvenile problems. In fact, it was the recognized need for additional recreation space in the Southeast section of the City that in 1926 led to the proposal for creating John McLaren Park.

Recreational Value of Site

The site of John McLaren Park is one of natural beauty and form. It consists of two high ridges, one of which reaches an elevation of 540 feet. From the six major hilltops and from the two ridges there are unexcelled views of San Francisco and the Bay. Trees planted in the thirties under the auspices of the W.P.A. now cover these ridges and have grown to maturity. At lower elevations a few gently sloping or level areas are suitable for playgrounds and active sports.

Because the terrain offers many fine viewpoints to the Bay, the distant hills of San Francisco and the skyline of the downtown district, the park site contains citywide recreational potentialities for scenic drives, picnicking and related activities. These features can be made a real attraction to people from all parts of the city and to out-of-town visitors. Geographically, the ridge is a continuation of the larger mountain which is topped by Twin Peaks and it sweeps southeast to the Bay at Candlestick Point.

The Importance of Access

In order to make the Park accessible, two types of connections of citywide importance are proposed. These are: (1) the John McLaren Parkway, tied into other parkways in the City and (2) connections to freeways and expressways. These parkways and freeways are included in the Trafficways Plan of the Transportation Section of the Master Plan now pending adoption by the City Planning Commission. They are shown on Plate 1, Proposed Parkway Connections.

Parkway Approaches and Connections

In order to be of value to the city as a whole John McLaren Park should be made easily accessible, not merely by adequate street approaches but by a parkway system connecting this large recreational area with other similar areas in the city. These parkways would make easily accessible certain unique features in John McLaren Park that are not duplicated in Golden Gate Park nor in any other park in the city. Because of the size and character of the Park site, an extensive system of scenic driveways within the Park can be developed. These driveways would serve as part of a complete city-wide system of parkways.

One parkway link approximately two miles in length is recommended to connect John McLaren Park with the Lake Merced area and Golden Gate Park. One section of this, the extension of Stanley Drive under Junipero Serra Boulevard, from the Lake Merced Area to Alemany Boulevard is programmed for construction by the Department of Public Works.

A second parkway approach is recommended to connect John McLaren Park with the Bayshore Freeway. It is proposed that this route follow Mansell Street; and that an extension be carried to Bayview Park and the Bay.

A third Parkway is recommended to approach John McLaren Park from Alemany Boulevard on the North by widening and improvement of Cambridge Street.



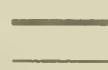
JOHN McLAREN PARK AREA

PROPOSED PARKWAY CONNECTIONS

PARKWAY
PARKWAY CONNECTION



FREEWAY
EXPRESSWAY



1
PLATE



IV RELATION OF PARK TO ADJACENT COMMUNITY AREAS

.....

John McLaren Park stands as the main division between two community areas, the Outer Mission area to the west including the Crocker-Amazon and Geneva districts, and the Bayshore community area to the east, including the Visitacion Valley, Portola, and Bayview districts. Therefore, it has an important function in serving these adjacent communities by providing sites for recreation and school facilities and enhancing residential values. Proper planning of the Park development to fulfill these important functions can be a force toward advancing economic stability and bettering social values in the adjacent communities and in the city as a whole.

Neighborhood Development

These communities on both sides of the park should be served by well placed junior and senior high schools and by large playfields. Standards as applied in the Master Plan of San Francisco call for central locations for these facilities easily accessible to the population served and with sufficient space to provide for modern building and site development. Within the communities, complete neighborhood units should be provided each with its own elementary school, playground and shopping center. It is with this basic concept as a premise that school sites and recreation areas are recommended as indicated on Plate 2, Land Use Plan.

Certain residential areas adjacent to the park, particularly those on the hilly section to the east, have developed in a scattered, haphazard manner and may in fact, be described as "arrested areas" under the terms of the Community Redevelopment Act. It is recommended that such areas be replatted for new development as a part of San Francisco's redevelopment program after the boundaries of the park have been redetermined. The need for sites for both private and public housing developments is urgent and, in these areas, many opportunities for both are to be found.

Urban redevelopment legislation provides an instrument for revising unsuitable street and lot patterns and rebuilding the area according to improved standards of site planning and subdivision design. Streets following the contours must replace many streets in the area, which have been plotted on grades impracticable and unsafe for vehicular traffic. In some cases these grades would be as high as 30 to 40 percent if they were to be developed.

V DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES OF THE PARK ITSELF

.....

With careful determination of the boundaries and best use of the natural scenic resources McLaren Park can become an outstanding attraction in the City, in addition to its normal local benefits. Because of the high percentage of sunny days in this southeast part of the city, the park would prove a valuable alternate to Golden Gate Park, the Zoological Gardens, the Museums and other units of the San Francisco park system. The City will benefit economically by giving its citizens and visitors more to see, more places to visit, more pleasurable and attractive things to do.

Type of Park Development.

The development of John McLaren Park should be in keeping so far as possible with the present natural character of the site. It would be a mistake to try to make this area resemble Golden Gate Park, a park area of quite different character. It should be designed and planted to maintain as much of the characteristics of the native California landscape as possible. An outstanding example of this type of park is Tilden Park in the East Bay Regional Park system.

Suggested Development Plan.

A general site plan should be prepared to indicate the primary features of a first-class park development in this part of the city. The boundaries depend to a considerable extent upon the slopes, marginal development outside the park and the improvements considered desirable for the park. The original plan prepared in 1928 included an 18-hole golf course. Since the area has been reduced in size, and the parts most suitable for a golf course given over to other uses, it would seem more important to develop other attractions. Among those obviously appropriate in a park of this size and type are:

1. Scenic drives and viewpoints.
2. Bridle trails and riding stables as a concession.
3. Foot paths and overlook structures.
4. Picnic and barbecue areas.
5. At least three areas for active play and use by surrounding neighborhoods.
6. An outdoor theatre.
7. A refreshment pavilion with a view terrace.
8. An archery range.
9. A youth camping area.
10. Planting, emphasizing native trees, shrubs, wildflowers.

The ultimate landscape effect in the park, which could be achieved in a decade or so, would be comparable with the natural woodlands of San Mateo County or Marin County. It would be a rich green landmark in the southern section of the city, a pleasing background for the tightly built areas of small homes surrounding it.

VI DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED BOUNDARIES AND ADJACENT LAND USES

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The boundary of John McLaren Park should follow natural topography wherever possible in order to leave within the park area those pieces of land most suited for park purposes and in order to leave outside the park area, land best suited to good residential use. It is obvious that streets and property lines must be followed in acquiring park land in order to avoid unusable or inaccessible remnants.

The boundary as proposed will permit the development of John McLaren Parkway as a perimeter drive around most of the park area with private residential development facing the park. The proposed perimeter parkway will encourage desirable residential building, increase the value of property facing the park and facilitate the movement around and into the park.

A summary of approximate amounts of land proposed for various uses in and around the park area, as shown on Plate 2, Land Use Plan, is given in the following table:

Total area within present official park boundaries....	318	Acres
Area owned by city (excluding streets)	217	ac.
Total area within proposed park boundaries	288	"
Area owned by city (excluding streets)	199	"
Net reduction in park area as proposed	30	"
Total area to be returned to residential use	46	"
Northeast section	22	"
Sunnydale section	19	"
France Avenue at Parkway.....	2	"
Russia and France Avenues.....	1.5	ac.
Brazil and Excelsior Avenues.....	1.5	
Total area to be designated for school purposes.....	16	"
University Street Elementary.....	5	ac.
Persia Avenue Junior High	11	"
Area on east boundary to be included in Park.....	27	"
Total owned by city (excluding streets)	4	"
Total area in Crocker-Amazon Reservoir Site	51	"
Area proposed for residences (including School & Shopping).....	16	"
Area to remain in recreation.....	35	"

A detailed description of the boundaries and adjacent land uses shown on Plate 3, Land Use Plan, is presented in the three sections which follow.

West Boundary - Geneva Avenue to Burrows Street

The proposed John McLaren Parkway would pass along the side slopes of the San Bruno Mountains from San Mateo County and drop down to a lower level between the recently subdivided areas and the quarry on the south side of Geneva Avenue opposite the east end of Crocker-Amazon Reservoir Site. A viaduct across Geneva Avenue would be necessary along with ramp connections for access and ingress. The details of these connections are omitted from this study. This main entry into John McLaren Park would consist of a corridor approximately 300 feet in width provided with hiking and bridle trails. To the east of the corridor it is proposed that the hilltop area and slopes comprising 19 acres immediately adjacent to the Sunnydale Elementary School be designated for residential purposes thereby rounding out the development of the present neighborhood. On the west side of the corridor it is suggested that approximately 35 acres of the southern portion of the Crocker-Amazon Reservoir Site be restored permanently to recreational use when the present temporary housing is removed. Eight of the existing baseball diamonds could be maintained to serve the neighboring community areas and the immediate vicinity. This recreation activity would be considered an integral function of the park under the newly constituted Recreation-Park Department. Additional large-scale playfields should be built in other portions of John McLaren Park.

It is further suggested that approximately 16 acres on the northern portion of the reservoir site be given over to permanent residential development. An additional 2 acres within the present Park boundary will make a total of 18 acres. Within this area a site of approximately 1.5 acres should be provided for a home school unit as proposed in the vicinity by the Board of Education in the Capital Improvement Program for 1950-51. A small neighborhood shopping center would also be desirable. This residential development could complete the street pattern in this area and round out neighborhood development.

Proceeding north, the John McLaren Parkway would form a definite boundary between park area and residential area and would provide an opportunity for homes to face on the perimeter drive. A connection from the parkway into the present park drive can be provided at Persia Avenue and at Brazil Avenue. Between these two avenues it is recommended that a site of 11 acres for a junior high school be reserved as proposed by the Board of Education and recommended earlier by the City Planning Commission in its report of March 24, 1949. The junior high school would be centrally located in this position to serve the surrounding populated area, and it would interfere with park development to a limited degree. The parkway should then proceed north from Brazil Avenue to Excelsior Avenue rising up the hill at a reasonable grade. Park property to the west facing on the proposed drive should be disposed of and matched with private property outside the park boundary to form a normal residential block with homes facing on park. Here a service street should be provided. At the crest of the hill, an overlook and picnic area would be provided where views may be had over the city from the Pacific Ocean around to San Francisco Bay. At this point a park entrance can be located adjacent to the newly developed residential area at La Grande Vue Terrace with its proposed neighborhood shopping center.

Northeast Boundary - Burrows Street and La Grande Avenue to Mansell Street

The Parkway would then turn east and continue along the present line of Burrows Street where grades are not excessive and where widening can permit a parkway treatment including street trees and planting, which would screen out to a degree the adjacent residential district. At the foot of the hill at Cambridge Street a connection to Alemany Boulevard may be made by turning north. Widening of Cambridge Street is recommended. Turning south along the Convent of the Good Shepherd the Parkway would continue on the present boundary and at Wayland Street would begin an extended curving alignment which would eliminate from the present park land an area of approximately 27 acres of land which is highly desirable for residential development. The parkway would then rise again to the crest of the hill at Mansell Street and there continue on to the Bayshore Freeway and to the proposed Hunters Point Expressway. The use of Mansell Street as a parkway connection will provide access to the proposed Southeast Senior High School at Holyoke Street. The 27 acres of park land proposed for exclusion from the boundaries when combined with private land outside and to the east of the park boundaries would offer an opportunity for residential redevelopment and the formation of an integrated neighborhood unit for a population of 2500 to 3000 persons. Replatting of the street system in this area to conform with modern subdivision standards, the provision of the 5 acre elementary school site requested by the Board of Education, and the establishment of the proposed neighborhood shopping center at Woolsey Street and University Street will assist the rehabilitation of this presently arrested area, and open the possibilities for modern home building.

Southwest Boundary - Mansell Street to Sunnydale Housing Project

At the crest of the hill where the proposed John McLaren Parkway meets Mansell Street and along the adjacent slopes south of this point, it is recommended that an area of approximately 27 acres lying to the west of the parkway right-of-way be included in the park land in order to make possible the use of this outstanding hilltop for an overlook, picnic grounds, and related uses. The acquisition as proposed would also protect the park from further haphazard development typical of the area. From the intersection of the proposed John McLaren Parkway and Mansell Street the perimeter drive would continue south around the steep hillside as a minor parkway connection to Visitacion Avenue where an easy alignment into the present park drive should be provided in order to complete the perimeter drive. This latter portion of the drive is essential for several reasons. It will offer an opportunity to replat the present street system east of the proposed drive which bears no relationship to the existing contours and which would be a permanent hindrance to residential development. New contour streets leading into this portion of the drive will make possible redevelopment of an area providing space for approximately 1000 persons. The land to the west of the drive on the steep hillside should then be included within the park boundaries. The drive is further essential in this area to provide proper access to the proposed Southeast Junior High School, property for which is now being acquired by the Board of Education in vicinity of Hahn and Campbell Streets.



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|-------|------------|----------|-----------|
| — | ORIGINAL | BOUNDARY | 550 ACRES |
| - - - | PRESENT | BOUNDARY | 318 ACRES |
| — | PROPOSED | BOUNDARY | 288 ACRES |
| ■ | CITY OWNED | PROPERTY | |
| □ | PRIVATE | PROPERTY | |



JOHN MCLAREN PARK AREA

PROPOSED PARK BOUNDARIES

VII RECOMMENDED STEPS FOR CARRYING OUT THE PLAN

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It is suggested that the following steps be taken to carry the general plan for the John McLaren Park Area to completion:

1. That the plan be studied by the various city departments concerned and that they report their recommendations to the Department of City Planning.
2. That a final plan of boundaries then be prepared for adoption by the Board of Supervisors based on the recommendations included in this report and on revisions by the various city departments.
3. That the Park Department have prepared an aerial topographic survey of the park property and immediately adjacent fringe area. Present topographic data is inaccurate. The cost of such a survey has been estimated at \$4,000.
4. That a detailed engineering study be made of the proposed John McLaren Parkway from Geneva Avenue to Burrows, Cambridge, and Mansell Streets and to Visitation Avenue in order to determine exact alignment and estimated construction costs. This study should include necessary approach streets to the Parkway.
5. That a general development plan of the Park based upon the topographic survey and the detailed study of the perimeter drive, be prepared for adoption by the Park Commission.
6. That funds be budgeted for early construction of the most needed elements of the park development plan.
7. That the study of the possibilities of designating an official redevelopment area in the section on the east side of the park which has been arrested by reason of bad street layout be undertaken by the Department of City Planning.

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